

CD 2012--21-22



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

Henri-Paul Sicsic, piano

Monday, February 27, 2012

7:30 p.m. Walter Hall

Edward Johnson Building

80 Queen's Park

2011-12 SEASON

Faculty Artist Series

Henri-Paul Sicsic, piano

CD 1

Seven Bagatelles, Op. 33

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

1. Andante grazioso, quasi allegretto
2. Scherzo: Allegro
3. Allegretto
4. Andante
5. Allegro, ma non troppo
6. Allegretto quasi andante
7. Presto

15 Variations and Fugue, in E-flat, Op. 35 ('Eroica' Variations)

8-

INTERMISSION

CD 2

Six Bagatelles, Op. 126

1. Andante con moto
2. Allegro
3. Andante
4. Presto
5. Quasi allegretto
- ↓ Presto - Andante amabile e con moto

Sonata No. 31, in A flat, Op. 110

6. Moderato cantabile molto espressivo
7. Allegro molto
- ↓ Adagio ma non troppo. Arioso dolente. Fuga: Allegro ma non troppo

Tonight's program is performed on the Edith McConica Steinway piano

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Program Notes

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

Seven Bagatelles, Op. 33 (1801-2)

Six Bagatelles, Op. 126 (1824)

Schubert wrote *Moments musicaux*, Mendelssohn wrote *Songs Without Words*, Grieg wrote *Lyric Pieces*.

Countless romantic composers penned what they called 'Album Leaves' (*Albumblätter*). All these are essentially the same thing: short character pieces that follow a mood, a melody or a particular inspiration. Before them, Beethoven wrote Bagatelles. These, too, are short, usually lighthearted pieces and he viewed them as occasional pieces, almost aphorisms. In spirit, they are the direct ancestors of the hugely popular 19th century character piece. When he first published a selection of them in a piano pedagogy book by Friedrich Startk, Beethoven used the German term *Kleinigkeiten*, which means, literally, 'little things' or 'light things.' Still, being Beethoven, there is more to be found in his occasional music than there is in many another composer's carefully pondered and grandly titled utterances.

Beethoven wrote 26 Bagatelles in all. The best known is the A minor Bagatelle subtitled *Für Elise*, WoO 59 (1810). Although this remained unpublished, he collected most of the rest into sets when he wished to publish them. The first collection, Op. 33, published in Vienna in 1803, contains seven Bagatelles. Each has its own distinctive characteristics. The first is playful, the second whimsical. The third is a simple, improvisatory two-part invention which plays with a striking juxtaposition of tonalities. Where the

fourth is uncomplicated and melodious and the fifth more pedagogical, the last two are the most ambitious of the set. No. 6 is reflective and thoughtful within a modest framework. The last one is more dynamic and rough-hewn, with the spirit of a scherzo movement from an early piano sonata.

The next collection, Op. 119, containing another 11 Bagatelles, was published 20 years later. Again, these are independent pieces, put together over a number of years and given to publishers when Beethoven needed the cash. Only the six Bagatelles, Op. 126 were designed as an entity. Significantly, he wrote "Cycle of Bagatelles" on the autograph. These bagatelles are all late works, written in 1823 and 1824 when he was completing the Ninth Symphony. Sketches for them exist in his notebooks, indicating that he took more than a little trouble over their composition and the ordering of them. Generally, they are both longer and more substantial than the Op. 119 collection. The cycle is planned with a key sequence of descending thirds and with the more lyrical music alternating with the quicker, terser statements. Beethoven, himself, called them "quite the best pieces of their kind that I have written."

15 Variations and Fugue, in E-flat, Op. 35 ('Eroica' Variations) (1802)

Beethoven did not give this substantial piece the title *Eroica Variations*. He preferred to call it *Prometheus Variations* – and asked as much from his publisher, who ignored the request. The title came about in the 19th century once it was realised that the variations

share a theme with the finale of the *Eroica* symphony. Today, we know that this connection runs even deeper and that the variations provided a blueprint for the finale of the symphony which lay one year in the future. The theme itself had an even earlier incarnation in a set of orchestral country dances that Beethoven wrote for the ballroom, in the winter of 1800-01. Then, he re-worked this same theme more prominently in the finale of his ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Op. 43. That Beethoven had even more to say with the theme became clear when he wrote the *Fifteen Variations and Fugue*, in E-flat in 1802. In giving the score an opus number (unlike several other collections of variations that he wrote around this time), Beethoven acknowledged that he considered the piece "among my most important musical works." The variations are "worked out in a quite new manner," he wrote to his publisher Breitkopf und Härtel in 1802 and added that they should be "included in the proper numbering of my great works, all the more, since the themes are by me." Beethoven builds the theme from the base line up, only arriving at the theme itself, high on the keyboard, after a series of three unnumbered introductory variations. In the process he underlines the drama – and humour – that moments of silence are to play in the powerful variations that follow. The variations are propelled by the harmonic skeleton of the theme as much as by its melodic contours. The finale starts *alla fuga* and there's a surprise in store – Beethoven's Op. 35 is full of them – when the fugue subject turns out to be the bass line with which we started. A grand coda brings back the theme in all its glory.

Sonata No. 31, in A-flat, Op. 110 (1821-2)

The structure of the late A-flat piano sonata is a long way from that of the sonatas Beethoven had written a quarter of a century earlier. Then, he had sought to balance and oppose related themes, structures and tonalities. Now, Beethoven's compositional process is more subtle and organic. It is more of an intellectual discipline to underpin the lofty spiritual concerns with which he was grappling. Motifs recur and are recalled from one movement to another. The movements are designed to follow one another without break and, sometimes, it might appear that there is a descriptive program underlying their considerable mood swings. But the music provides its own coherent map and verbal description becomes irrelevant.

Beethoven writes *con amabilità* at the opening of the first movement and the music maintains amiability and warmth of feeling throughout. With its rapidly changing mood and rhythms, the second movement has the character of one of Beethoven's gruff Bagatelles. Its function is that of a scherzo. It even includes allusions to the themes of two popular songs. But the juxtaposition of the commonplace with the sublime was typical of Beethoven. In his music, the sacred and the profane co-exist. The second is the most assertive of the movements. But even here, Beethoven ends with a question mark, declining, as it were, to offer solutions.

The slow movement is linked to and, essentially a part of the finale and both are heard twice, the second appearance being a transcendent variation of the first. Together, the movements carry much of the weight of the sonata. Three bars of introduction and an operatic recitative introduce a vocal song of lamentation, marked *Arioso dolente*. It

is to provide an extreme contrast with the serene fugue that follows. Although Beethoven gives many interpretative directions for the performer, the score poses complex questions. They are only partially resolved when it emerges that the fugue subject, which Beethoven puts through the most intricate permutations, is itself a variation of the same tender theme with which the sonata began. The progression from *Arioso dolente* to the closing fugue has no parallel in Beethoven's earlier music (though the fusion of sonata and fugal procedures

was to underpin much of his late music). Critic William Kinderman has compared the progression with that of the *Agnus Dei* and *Dona nobis pacem* movements in the *Missa Solemnis*, music that Beethoven was also wrestling with at the time. At both a musical and a spiritual level, he suggests that the sonata mirrors the promise of liberation that emerges from an endless cycle of suffering and injustice reflected in the music of the mass.

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Comments welcomed: khnates@sympatico.ca

Biography

Canadian pianist **HENRI-PAUL SICSIC** thrills audiences across North America and Europe with his intense, passionate and imaginative performances.

A concerto soloist, recitalist and chamber musician, pianist Henri-Paul Sicsic has appeared with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Maryland Symphony Orchestra, the Pasadena Philharmonic, the Okanagan Symphony Orchestra, the Abbotsford Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Nice, among others. His performances have been aired in New York City on WQXR radio, on the National French program "France Musique" in other major centers in the U.S. and on the C.B.C. in Canada.

His teachers include Juliette Audibert-Lambert (herself a student of Gabriel Fauré and of Alfred Cortot), Pierre Sancan, and renowned pianist and master teacher John Perry.

Henri-Paul Sicsic is also an inspired pedagogue with a tremendous following. He was appointed to the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto in July of 2007. In 2005 he received the Killam Teaching Prize, one of the

highest academic honours awarded in Canada.

Sicsic taught at Rice University from 1986 to 1992 as the associate of eminent artist-teacher John Perry. He was a member of the piano faculty at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver for thirteen years. His strong commitment to teaching and ability to enrich and inspire young talents is legendary, and his students have distinguished themselves at the national and international levels, earning prestigious Fulbright and Canada Council grants and winning top prizes and awards at major competitions.

At the Conservatoire de Nice, France, Sicsic was awarded a first prize with honours in piano, a first prize in chamber music, and a conducting diploma. As a pianist, he also received a first prize at the Grand Prix de la Ville de Nice Competition and top prize at the Royaume de la Musique National Radio Competition in France.

Henri-Paul is a proponent of the Alexander Technique and also studies Tai Chi Chuan. He enjoys French cuisine and is an avid runner.

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

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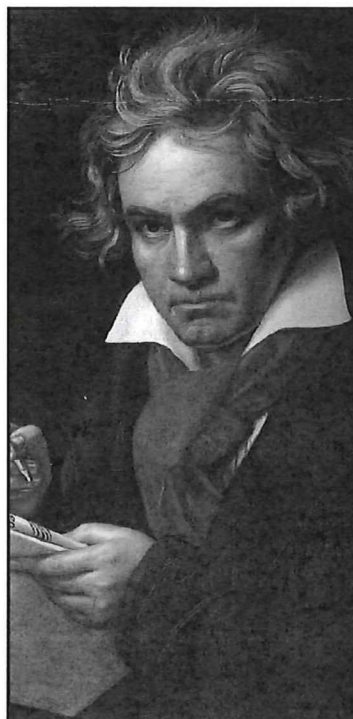
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7:30 pm. Walter Hall.

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TCHAIKOVSKY

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University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra

David Briskin, conductor

Jamie Kruspe, violin

Thursday, April 5, 2012

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For tickets call 416-408-0208

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